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Innovative and Technology-driven Solutions

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## Choosing A More Prosperous Future *By Ken Breeden, Ph.D*

Workforce development and productivity enhancement have everything to do with economic development in all developed nations, including ours. Actually, we have known for decades that we couldn't continue to grow and prosper on a basis of low-skill, low-wage jobs. Numerous studies and reports told us this. The one I remember best was the report (20 years ago) of the National Commission on Skills in the Workforce, "America's Choice, High Skills or Low Wages." This report concluded that, "Americans are unwittingly making a choice. It is a choice that we probably would not make if we were aware of the consequences. Yet every day that choice is becoming more difficult to reverse. The choice America is making is a choice between high skills and low wages. Gradually, silently, we are choosing low wages. There is still time



Georgia Department of Economic Development

to make the other choice—one that will lead to a more prosperous future. In order to do so, we must fundamentally change our approach to education and work".

I believed then and believe now that there was great wisdom in this report. America cannot afford to try to compete on a basis of low skills and low wages. The only logical answer for our society is to create high-performance work organizations that compete on a basis of increased productivity and high-skill, high-wage jobs. We all know that there are emerging economies that are growing on a basis of low wages, just as the Sunbelt states in the Southeast grew over the past four decades or so. But that is a short-range economic strategy. The long-range winners will be the ones who drive down labor costs through high productivity, not low wages.

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## Change Is Good *By Martha Schoonmaker, CECD*

Just 10 years ago, most economic development strategies focused on marketing for prospects. An economic developer concentrated on how to put the best marketing package together—available sites, unemployment rates, wage rates, quality of life materials—to attract a 500-employee manufacturing company to town.

More recently, given that fewer companies are relocating or expanding, economic developers have had to broaden their game plan to include business retention, entrepreneurial development, and tourism, and workforce development; diversifying the community's portfolio, so to speak. Today's tools range from real estate redevelopment—think of that big box that Wal-Mart left behind when it moved into its new Super Wal-Mart facility—to lean manufacturing, as in how can you help an existing manufacturer be more productive so it will stay in the community, even if that means reducing employment.

Economic crises have forced developers to either change or watch their communities—state, regional, or local—go down the tubes. And change is hard, very hard, so hard in fact that there are still economic developers—and this is a mindset not necessarily age-related—who refuse to even consider the possibility.

How does an economic developer broaden her/his scope of knowledge and application? How does an economic developer cope with change? Perhaps for a certain employer or in a particular position, you cannot readily change your job description—that is, if you were hired for marketing, that's doubtless what you'll do initially. However, economic development today means more than marketing, and you can expand your skill sets to meet changing needs of the community. You can become

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## Future — continued from page 2

This was the thinking at the core of the dramatic changes in Georgia's technical colleges over the past 20 years. We spent over \$1 billion modernizing existing facilities and building new ones, including more than 30 new campuses. The purpose of this was to create modern facilities that were attractive to a broader range of students, and to make them accessible to people who don't have the resources to commute long distances. The basic assumption was that in order to prosper, communities must be able to grow their own high-skill workforce.

I believe that Georgia should develop a high-skill, high-wage economic development strategy that will be the envy of the world. We may be a lot closer already than we realize. I've learned even more since retiring, doing consulting work in other states and working with Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute, that the industrial community in many states envies our workforce development system. We have one of the finest engineering schools in the world. Through the Georgia Research Alliance, we have made great strides in basic research. Efforts such as EDI and ATDC are helping grow new businesses and improve productivity of existing ones. Our Quick Start program is respected throughout the industrialized world, and our Technical College System is highly regarded in the business/industrial community.



DTAE

Ken Breeden.

The common wisdom seems to be that the manufacturing sector of our economy is doomed.

I don't believe that at all. I visit companies every week who are thriving through high productivity and have found products and markets that work for them. While manufacturing jobs may not grow again at the pace we enjoyed over the past few decades, they can and should continue to be a critical component in our continued economic growth. And through the continued development of new sectors of high-performance work organizations such as modern distribution centers, telecommunications, incoming call centers, and our growing tourism and recreational facilities, we are growing a more diversified economy that will not rely on a single business sector to ensure future prosperity.

We should be grateful for the visionary people who came before us and established Georgia as the premier "New South" state. And I hope that future generations will see the current generation of Georgians as the visionary people who established Georgia as a premier "New World" state. This will only happen if we understand the economic competition of the future and move boldly to create an environment where the work organizations of the present and future can thrive and prosper. ♦

—Ken Breeden, Ph.D.

## Change — continued from page 2

versatile and adaptable by borrowing from other experiences or tapping newly acquired knowledge. For instance, a project manager who knows something about real estate conceivably could suggest a creative way to restore and reuse an abandoned building downtown be it for a new or existing firm, an entrepreneur, or even tourism.

With this in mind, below are questions to ask yourself about your approach to your job and to professional development.

**How often do you attend courses or conferences that would pertain to a different environment in which you are currently working?** That is, if you are from a rural community, try a more metro-focused class, and vice versa. You would be

surprised at the number of issues that are the same, just on a different scale. Might there be lessons learned from either side that could apply to your situation? Could you see yourself working in another type of community some day?

**How often do you really attend courses and conferences?** By contrast, do you sign up for a professional development opportunity only to spend most of your time outside the classroom? What type of person do you want to work for and with—people who show leadership through example or people who go through the motions in their professional development? What kind of person are you?

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**What do you do with the information you learn at a conference or course?**

Do you close the notebook and put it on the shelf, or do you take stock of what you learned and intentionally find a way to include at least one or two nuggets into your work plan? From my professional standpoint, if the courses you are attending here at Georgia Tech are not causing you to think and/or act differently in your job, then we have not been successful. It is not enough to understand the changes to our economy or our profession or to simply enjoy a good speaker. You must apply what you learn in some way from the experience for it to be of value.

**Are you sitting through classes only because they are required for certification?** Are you taking the certification exam just to add to your resume or because the job requires it? Neither is a good use of your time and effort unless you plan to change your course of action in your daily professional life to reflect a new level of excelling.

**I would suggest economic development positions are part of the Creative Class that Richard Florida writes about in *The Rise of the Creative Class*.** "Creativity....It is a matter of sifting through

data, perceptions and materials to come up with combinations that are new and useful." Can you see application to your job in everything you do? Do you intentionally expose yourself to new and different ideas whether in your personal or professional life?

Do you ever read opposing opinions just to see if there is kernel of truth to be found?

**Do you get up every morning asking yourself what can you do differently in your job?** Is there another approach you can use? Are you doing the best that you can to stay current and fresh for your community?

Yes, there have been many changes in the economic development profession, ranging from using the Internet for marketing and communications to managing quality growth and development. The key to working with them is to remain flexible and not feel threatened by them. If your mindset is one of learning and applying what you learn, initiating new thoughts and actions in your communities or jobs, you will be just fine. However, if your mindset is not conducive to change and innovation, then the plight of economic developers tomorrow may be little different from that of the textile workers of today. ♦

—Martha Schoonmaker, CECd



Gary Meek

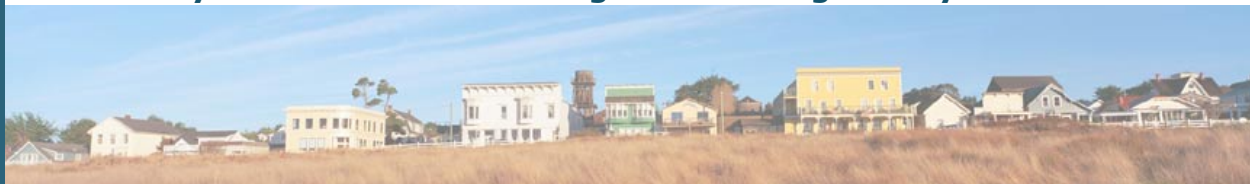
EDI's Basic Economic Development Course.

## Be on the lookout!

We'll be polling our *Focus on Communities* readers in the next two weeks, and your opinion is vital to the future of this publication.

You'll receive an e-mail with a link to a website containing the questionnaire. Please take the time to respond – it's fun, it's easy, and it's fast. So let us hear from you.

**Thank you in advance for taking the time to give us your feedback.**



## A Q&A with USDA Rural Development's Stone Workman

**S**tone Workman received presidential appointment as state director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Office in March 2001. A professional economic developer, he had been working for the Jasper County Development Authority and serving as a city council member in Monticello. The South Carolina native earned his bachelor's degree from Clemson and has done post-graduate work in economic development at Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia.

**Focus:** Tell us about USDA Rural Development. What is your office's mission?

**Workman:** USDA Rural Development is the lead federal agency involved in rural economic development issues. We help people in rural Georgia develop sustainable communities and improve their quality of life.



Chuck Moore  
Stone Workman.

**Focus:** In what ways does USDA Rural Development help Georgia's communities? What resources does your office provide?

**Workman:** We have loan and grant programs to help communities build water and sewer systems, housing, health clinics, daycare facilities, fire stations, and electric and telephone systems. We can help them purchase police cars, ambulances, and other essential equipment.

We promote economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks and grants to local governments or non-profits to assist small and emerging businesses. We offer technical assistance and information to help agricultural and other cooperatives get started and improve the success of their member services. And we provide technical assistance to help communities undertake community empowerment programs.

In FY 2004, we helped 946 families buy their own homes; seven communities install water and sewerage systems serving 8,782 households; and assisted businesses with creating or saving 1,545 jobs. We funded essential facilities and equipment, including police cars, fire trucks, a garbage truck, a city hall, a courthouse, and a food bank.

**Focus:** Who are your principal partners regarding economic development in Georgia?

**Workman:** The local community, local banks, Regional Economic Development Centers, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, Georgia Rural Development Council, Georgia Department of Economic Development, Georgia Tech, University of Georgia, Oglethorpe Power, and Georgia Power, among others. For example, earlier this year, we worked together to stage the biannual Celebrating Rural Georgia conference in Dalton, which more than 700 people attended. This is an opportunity for rural communities in Georgia to network and to participate in workshops at the same time.

**Focus:** You've been at the helm for four years. What have been your office's key milestones or achievements during that time?

**Workman:** My experience in local government showed that the only difference between large and small communities is the size of their staffs in local government and economic development. I wanted USDA Rural Development to be known as the federal agency that was really here, in body as well as soul, to assist rural communities to do the things necessary for them to advance. I think our 163 Rural Development employees have responded time and again to meet and exceed this challenge. By following this principle, our numbers have been outstanding, including FY 2004 when more than one-half billion dollars in housing, business, and community infrastructure funds were invested in our state.

**Focus:** USDA recently awarded a Rural Business Opportunity Grant to fund a collaborative effort among many state partners to help foster economic development in **Clay, Quitman, Randolph, and Stewart** counties. Tell us about this grant program and how it might apply to other Georgia communities.

**Workman:** EDI received a grant to lead a partnership project to accelerate economic development innovation within Clay, Quitman, Randolph, and Stewart counties, which are served by the Southern Lower Chattahoochee Council of Governments Inc. (See page 12.)

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## **Workman** — continued from page 5

This project illustrates two programs that communities might want to examine. One is to become a "champion community" like these four Southern Lower Chattahoochee communities. The program requires communities to make a commitment to work together for positive change. With technical assistance from USDA Rural Development, these communities develop a strategic plan with specific benchmarks and timelines that must be documented. It also gives such communities extra consideration for Rural Development funding applications.

The Rural Business Opportunity Grant can be used to (1) identify and analyze business opportunities; (2) identify, train, and assist existing or prospective rural entrepreneurs; (3) establish business support centers; (4) conduct community or multi-county economic development planning; (5) establish centers for training, technology, and trade; and (6) conduct leadership development training.

**Focus:** What other grant programs are provided through your office?

**Workman:** We have loan, grant, and combination loan/grant programs available in business, community programs, housing, utilities, and broadband and telephone access. We encourage anyone interested to visit the website for information or to call one of our offices around the state.

**Focus:** What do you see as the most critical issues affecting rural Georgia today? What are some of the key challenges? And are these different from the past?

**Workman:** I see water, education, and credit-worthiness as the three big issues today. While the focus has been on Atlanta's water and sewer woes, at least an equal amount of funding is needed to replace the aging infrastructure in the rural areas of our state. My son attends public school in Monticello, and I am very aware of the challenges of public education in rural areas and how important a quality system is for economic development. Credit-worthiness is the number-one problem preventing our citizens from achieving the American dream of home ownership. This may also be an educational challenge.

The solutions increasingly must be found locally. Federal and state assistance is declining in these budget-challenged times. Grants will continue to be

made, but the amount of dollars is decreasing while accountability is increasing.

**Focus:** Over the past 10 to 12 years, what strides has rural Georgia made generally? What opportunities do you see for these locales?

**Workman:** Rural Georgia recognizes that economic growth is not totally dependent on agriculture. Many areas are looking to tourism, non-traditional agriculture, and technology to compete in today's global marketplace.

**Focus:** What rural Georgia communities appear to be thriving from an economic development standpoint, and why?

**Workman:** The communities that surround **Atlanta** and the north Georgia counties have seen a tremendous economic growth over the past 10 years. People commute to their jobs via interstates. The construction boom due to out-migration of urbanites has had a huge economic impact. Also, many rural communities located near Georgia's economic centers, or metropolitan statistical areas, are progressing nicely due to their proximity to job and educational opportunities. **Dublin, Thomasville, Tifton, and Statesboro** are larger cities doing well. **Cordele, Madison, Covington, Elberton, Monticello, and Folkston** are progressive smaller cities.

**Focus:** What advice do you have for local economic developers preparing their communities for growth?

**Workman:** The best thing they can do is to assist their local elected officials in becoming educated about local economic development. Because solutions are going to have to be found locally, it will be imperative that local officials understand the challenges and resources before they can set their communities' objectives. The Academy of Economic Development is one source of this education.

I used to have a saying about my community, Monticello, and how we were known as a rural community making great strides. The saying was, "Yes, we are poor, but we are not pathetic." Nobody cares if you are poor, but nobody will help you if you are pathetic about it. ❖

**Specific information on Rural Development programs is available on the Internet at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/ga](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ga).**



## Innovative Suggestions for Developing North Hall

At the request of the **Hall County** Board of Commissioners, EDI examined development opportunities for the State Route 365 Corridor, which extends from **Gainesville** through north Georgia. The emphasis was on the "highest and best use" for the corridor. In particular, county leaders envisioned the development of non-polluting, higher-wage industries along this route, but sought guidance regarding which specific industries would be most appropriate to pursue given the community's assets and supportive infrastructure. Leaders also expressed interest in aesthetically pleasing development along the corridor, including high-quality, tourism-related development along three miles of the 15-mile route, if it appears well-suited and feasible.

Joining EDI on this 2004 project was the Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD) at Georgia Tech. Given the interest of community stakeholders in high-quality development, CQGRD examined the quality growth potential of the corridor and its surrounding region.

To accomplish these goals, the Georgia Tech team first evaluated the community's assets (broadly defined) and identified the highest and best uses for the corridor, including the most strategic target industries, based on a cluster analysis, that may have the strongest potential given the area's assets. The team also identified feasible options for expanding tourism development and preserving the corridor's quality growth assets, helped generate consensus among key local interests to determine Hall's marketing objectives, and provided recommendations for an actionable strategic plan.

In October 2004, EDI and CQGRD presented recommendations for industry cluster development and supportive strategic goals to more than 100 Hall County leaders during a specially called session of

the Board of Commissioners. Recommendations also were made concerning economic development and quality growth for the 365 Corridor in particular and Hall County as a whole. The presentation was followed by a period of public comment.

"Thanks to EDI's thorough research, interviewing of stakeholders, and identification of developmental strengths and

weaknesses, we have a valuable tool with which to plan and encourage corridor development," says Gary Gibbs, former chairman of the Board of Commissioners.

"It was abundantly clear," says Gibbs, "that the efforts put forth by EDI and CQGRD were exhaustive, their reports succinct, and their analysis insightful. Community leaders

have been unanimous in expressing their appreciation for the quality and quantity of the documentation."

In January 2005, a coalition of community leaders representing the United Way of Hall County, Healthy Hall Coalition, and Commission for Families and Children conducted a community forum to begin an action planning process based on recommendations provided by the Georgia Tech team. ♦



## South Georgia Communities Try Technology for Growth

In 2003, EDI conducted a strategic assessment of community economic development progress and potential for the **Ben Hill-Irwin County** Joint Development Authority (JDA). The effort was aimed at examining how to best support and foster technology-led economic development in the two counties as it related to Millennium Technology Point, a newly constructed 214-acre technology park.

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## Growth — continued from page 7

EDI staff also helped identify strategic business clusters that may have the strongest potential for recruitment into the park based on community assets and to formulate a strategy for helping local businesses tap into technology opportunities and successfully integrate technology into the local economy. Issues for the community included evaluation of goals of the park, development of a marketing strategy, lack of broad-based use of technology, and need for leadership development.

In addition to data gathering and analysis, the EDI team interviewed more than 60 stakeholders and partners, and in August 2003 delivered recommendations for strategic goals to the JDA. Community leaders and citizens chose to pursue four of the

suggested goals—growing new leadership, building community solidarity, supporting new and existing business and industry, and undertaking business recruitment and marketing.

The community also created a technology alliance with work groups to pursue community projects concerning education, Internet connectivity, business development, and prospect development.

According to JDA Executive Director John Flythe, "Georgia Tech's strategic plan services for communities has helped our community stakeholders to join together and work on meaningful projects that will help us to accomplish our economic development goals." ♦

## Innovation Centers Link Business with Academia

Georgia's Centers of Innovation program, launched by Governor Sonny Perdue in 2003 and managed by Georgia Tech's Office of Economic Development and Technology Ventures, is showing early signs of momentum and success.

The five centers have attracted nearly \$1 million in federal research and development grant funding, several projects are under way, and 16 new jobs have been created.

The centers—located in **Augusta**, **Columbus**, **Tifton**, **Savannah**, and **Warner Robins** and aligned with distinct industry sectors—also are undertaking research projects. For example, at the Maritime Logistics Innovation Center researchers are working on a pilot project designed to further reduce the Port of Savannah's truck turn times and build a stronger communications network between the Georgia Ports Authority and its customers. And the Agriculture Innovation Center has spawned a start-up firm focused on irrigation and has attracted Bayer Ag Corporation to its incubator facility.

According to program manager Chris Downing, a key concept of the innovation centers is matching industry-defined problems with appropriate aca-

ademic research, and the program has grant money to help fund this applied research.

"In addition to applied R&D," he says, "each innovation center provides incubation services to start-up companies and entrepreneurial support to individuals and communities in the surrounding area." He adds that entrepreneurial assistance is not restricted to a center's research/industry focus.

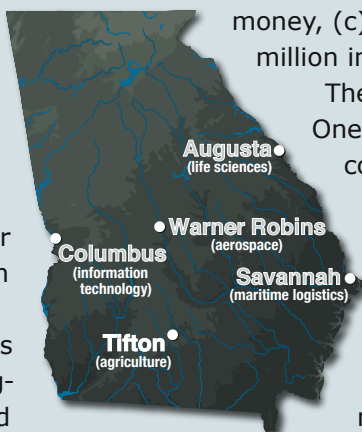
Among quantifiable first-year goals: (a) 50 new jobs created, (b) \$250,000 federal R&D grant money, (c) 20 technology transfer deals, and (d) \$2 million in new investment from existing industry.

The Centers of Innovation are funded by the OneGeorgia program, and marketing support comes from the Georgia Department of

Economic Development. The centers are governed by a board of directors, led by Dan Papp, vice chancellor of the state Board of Regents, and also includes Georgia Tech Vice Provost Wayne Hodges; Jeff Strane of the Georgia Department of Economic Development's Office of Science and Technology; Nancy Cobb of the OneGeorgia Authority; and Mike Cassidy with the Georgia Research Alliance.

Additional information on the Georgia Centers for Innovation program is available at:

[www.georgiainnovation.org](http://www.georgiainnovation.org).





## Moving Forward in Fannin

Georgia Tech's Accelerator Program, designed to help communities develop innovative plans and quickly put them into action, was completed in **Fannin County** in December 2003, and some promising results have already appeared. This effort was sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the Georgia Department of Labor, and the Levi Strauss Foundation.

Deployment of the program in this north Georgia community came in the aftermath of major industry closures and arose from a grassroots visioning initiative called Fannin's Future. For the first six months of 2003, an EDI team conducted detailed assessments of the county's economic trends, entrepreneur readiness, tourism and technology opportunities, workforce development, support for existing business and industry, physical infrastructure, industrial properties, public policies, and retirement needs. Then followed six months of coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance to help the county's leadership implement actions based on those assessments.

"Similar to how incubators assist entrepreneurs during the start-up phases of their company, we assist community leaders during the start-up phase of their strategic planning process," says EDI's Joy Wilkins, CECD, of the Accelerator Program's role.

Based on the assessments, EDI recommended 10 strategic goals, with related action items, for Fannin County to pursue for reaching the Fannin's Future vision. The community chose to pursue six of these goals. Dozens of citizens have contributed thousands of volunteer hours to this effort. To date:

- The Tourism Alliance conducted a tourism survey, developed a branding strategy ("Georgia's Blue Ridge Experience"), published a new visitors guide, received a grant of \$10,000 from the state Department of Economic Development for marketing, and completed a Historic/Cultural Tourism Resource Assessment through the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

- The Business Development Alliance surveyed 70 local entrepreneurs and completed the state's entrepreneur readiness review process, which led to Fannin County being designated as Georgia's third "Entrepreneur Friendly Community." The alliance is expanding entrepreneur support through existing business organizations and investigating the potential for starting a local chapter of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives).

- The Workforce Alliance hosted two well-attended career days at the high school at which community leaders discussed career options with students. The Alliance provided 800 students with a "real-life fact sheet" related to their career interests with information on educational requirements, basic expenses to expect in pursuit of career, and salaries.

- The Technology Alliance held a technology fair for the public at which information on available technology services was made available to local businesses. Online banking, online library services, and the school's online Parent Connect program were featured. The alliance is working to incorporate wireless technologies into area events.

- The Public Policy Alliance conducted a series of public forums on the value of building codes and worked with the builders association and the county to create a building code ordinance that was later adopted by the county commission. As of January 2005, Fannin County has building codes and two inspectors to enforce the codes. The alliance also conducted public forums and research to develop a land-use planning ordinance, an effort the county commission is working to implement.

"EDI's service provided Fannin County with a solid foundation for economic and community development," says Kristin Gunia, executive director of the local development authority. "The Accelerator Program provided a guide for our community and fostered the creation of initiatives and programs under the umbrella of Fannin's Future that will steer Fannin County to future success." ♦



## Environmental Management Systems Make Sense

In late January, the PEER Center at Georgia Tech, in conjunction with its Florida counterpart (called TREEO), sponsored a training workshop in Atlanta that drew 87 participants, mostly program managers and legal staff from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region IV that covers eight southeastern states. The two-day event, says EDI's Deann Desai, project director for Tech's PEER Center, was basic awareness training on environmental management systems (EMS)—what it is, what the benefits are, and how PEER can help.

So what is the PEER Center and what is EMS? The PEER Center is a central clearinghouse of information for local, state, and federal government entities that are considering implementing or have implemented an innovative system for managing their environmental impacts (i.e., environmental management system or EMS). Entities implementing an EMS include cities, counties, schools, transit authorities, prisons, Department of Defense facilities, water/sewer facilities, parks, and zoos, to name a few.

The benefits of EMS are plentiful, ranging from financial and operational to environmental. Financial benefits may include improved bond ratings, reduced insurance premiums, increased insurance coverage, reduction in fines, and reduced liabilities. Reduced air emissions, energy consumption, and water consumption are among several potential environmental benefits which also include improved management of land use, storm water, historical resources, emergency systems, and endangered species.

Georgia Tech's PEER Center recently kicked off its first Georgia-based local government pilot project in **Bartow County**. Center staff are working with a public-private partnership within the county to establish a community-wide EMS. Participating are industry representatives from Shaw, Anheuser-

Busch, and Georgia Power Company, as well as local government agencies such as the public schools, sheriff's office, and public works. Others include the local hospital, retail and agribusiness sectors, and Keep Bartow Beautiful. The chamber of commerce will host meetings and events, and results will appear on an EDI-established Web site. If successful, says Desai, EPA could make it a national model.

Last year, PEER Center staff completed a state pilot project for the Georgia Department of Corrections to reduce utility costs at three state prisons – Scott, Baldwin, Hancock – of different ages and levels of

security. Desai adds that EDI has trained staff at 74 of Georgia's 77 prison systems on EMS. "Other state agencies could adapt this approach," she says.

Based on the notion that environmental management systems can work for local governments as well as for private-sector firms, EPA in June 2002 established the national PEER Center to help public-sector organizations—ranging from city halls to water treatment plants—with information, technical assistance, and training. EDI was selected as one of eleven local resource centers across the country to assist such entities with adopting best practices. EDI was picked because of its expertise and capacity, says Desai, pointing to EDI's extensive work with ISO 14001 and energy and environmental management, plus connections with environ-

mental expertise at the Georgia Tech Research Institute and other Georgia Tech groups.

The national PEER Center evolved from earlier pilot programs involving almost two dozen municipal, county, and state entities throughout the United States. Those efforts validated the environmental and economic benefit of EMS in the public sector, such as improved communications, cost savings, and enhanced operational efficiency. ♦

### PEER: What's in It for Me?

- Smart Growth
- Comprehensive Plan Guidance
- Bond Rating Improvement
- Reduction in Insurance Premiums
- Improved Land Use Allocation
- Improved Capacity
- Reduced Air Emissions
- Improved Storm Water Management
- Reduced Energy Consumption
- Reduced Water Consumption
- Improved Emergency Response Services
- Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency
- Compliance with Regulations
- Management of Legal Issues
- Liability Reduction
- Cost Reduction
- Improved Community Image

## Fostering an Entrepreneur-Friendly Culture

To improve the environment for entrepreneurs, Georgia Tech's Economic Development Institute (EDI) has teamed with the state Department of Economic Development (DEcD) to devise and implement a program that designates communities as "entrepreneur friendly." Five locales recently have received such designation—**Valdosta/Lowndes County, Douglas/Coffee County, Ashburn/Turner County, Adell/Cook County, and Fannin County.** According to EDI's Don Betts, CEcD, the goal is to have a total of 10 by this July.

Research indicates, says Betts, that success comes with addressing core areas of entrepreneurship—awareness and support, leadership, use of existing resources, identification of local assets, and discussions with entrepreneurs. Via this program, DEcD's regional marketing managers help communities tackle these areas. The next step entails an entrepreneur readiness review by EDI and DEcD, along with several other appropriate state agencies such as the Small Business Development Center. Subsequent designation of "entrepreneur friendly" enables these communities to highlight their business climate and serve as examples for others.

When they're ready to implement strategies, EDI can hook them up with specific resources, say Betts, such as best-practices communities and specialized training. "Ultimately, such efforts will increase the number and success rate of entrepreneurs in these communities," he says, explaining that some would-be entrepreneurs may be more willing to take the risk when they know help is available and existing entrepreneurs realize they can receive customized assistance that bolsters their business.

"The program," says Betts, "seeks to change the economic development culture of Georgia's communities to focusing on and supporting homegrown opportunities. Entrepreneurial enterprises tend to remain, and grow, in their locales."

He adds that no other state enjoys the level of support Georgia communities have from the Governor's Office and DEcD, including the Office of Entrepreneur and Small Business Development and its director, Mary Ellen McClanahan.

These reviews and subsequent implementation are all funded by the OneGeorgia Authority and its new Centers of Innovation program. ♦

## E-Tourism: Next Exit

Technology is repaving tourism's routes and making them more accessible.

Early last year, EDI researchers identified an effective means of sharing high-speed Internet access with visitors that limited potential security and liability issues. The Visitor Internet Points (VIP) project employed technology called an Internet "hotspot" controller, or subscriber gateway, that is available on the open market but remains largely unknown to tourism development professionals.

Now, with financial support from the Georgia Rural Economic Development Center at East Georgia College, EDI is taking the next step with VIP, integrating physical connectivity with easy and flexible access to useful information such as directions to attractions and dates of events. The current project adds technology called a content management system to the subscriber gateway to push tourism information via a provided workstation or a visitor's own notebook computer and to gather information about the visitors and their interests.

Together, the technologies can enable visitor information centers to rapidly and inexpensively deploy and manage systems that function as Internet access points, information kiosks, and visitor registration books. A few years ago, such a system would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to build, and would have been unwieldy and difficult to update, but that's no longer the case.

The system can be a means to draw travelers off the interstate and get them to spend more time in the area. It acts as a unified database of a region's tourism assets and events, and allows visitor centers to securely and safely provide Internet access to visitors. Using the system, tourism development professionals and tourism asset owners can easily manage and update their information, and visitors can quickly obtain this information based on their interests, geographic location, or dates.

The EDI team has developed a prototype of the enhanced system, called VIA for Visitor Information Access, which will be reviewed by chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus, and other stakeholders in the project's focus area along I-16 this March. Two demonstration locations for the system will be established along I-16 in April, most likely in **Dublin** or **Metter**. If successful, the system could be used elsewhere in Georgia. ♦



## Acceleration with a Regional Approach

With funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), EDI recently launched its Accelerator Program in four southwest Georgia counties. USDA provided \$50,000 to help quicken the pace of economic development in **Stewart, Randolph, Clay, and Quitman**. Partners include the Southern Lower Chattahoochee Council of Governments, Lower Chattahoochee Regional Development Center, Georgia Power Company, and the state Department of Economic Development.



The first stage entails interviews with community leaders, an assessment of strategic opportunities, and recommendations to address challenges and opportunities. The second stage consists of community meetings in the individual counties and region as a whole to discuss recommendations and seek input. The third and final stage involves ongoing coaching and technical assistance to help communities implement their strategic initiatives. The program will extend approximately two years.

Says USDA state director Stone Workman, "We are blessed in Georgia to have many excellent partners to help our rural communities stimulate economic development. This is an exciting initiative that can make a difference."

The Accelerator Program, previously deployed in **Tattnall** and **Fannin** counties, helps communities build capacity and internal and external connections through network alliances. These alliances provide a sustainable framework for action that enables communities to collaborate to solve problems and transform challenges into opportunities. The goal is to strengthen the community's ability to create and grow new companies, expand and retain existing businesses, market to new businesses and industries, and attract dollars from new ventures such as tourism. ❖

## Assessing Innovation Potential in Peach

**Peach County** recently found itself in a position similar to many Georgia communities. With a growing interest in bringing about economic development innovation, the community's many economic development-related organizations began asking what role they can and should play in the process.

In late January, EDI staff began conducting an economic development capacity review that started with one-on-one interviews with selected economic development organizations and community leaders. The mission: to develop a sustainable and innovative economic development program that best utilizes the resources of the various economic development organizations in the community.

To determine who plays what roles, EDI developed questionnaires based on key components of a sound economic development program. The team then interviewed selected organizations with county-wide responsibilities and gathered information on how these organizations view their roles and which are responsible for what. Staff also spoke with various community leaders to determine who they see as having certain responsibilities for economic development in Peach County.

EDI also is reviewing plans, studies, and initiatives conducted within the past three to five years to help identify key issues or items that should be included in the program and which groups should be addressing them. Also under review are the local comprehensive plan and short-term work program updates, as well as past studies and initiatives conducted by statewide and regional partners.

From this data, EDI will develop a matrix to identify gaps in services and overlapping responsibilities. The project is scheduled for completion in this Spring, when EDI plans to hold a focus group session to review the findings and identify next steps Peach County should take to devise a sustainable and innovative program. ❖

## Studies of Earth, Water, and Air Assist Economic Development

Georgia Tech's School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences (EAS) literally covers a lot of ground, and water, and in doing so contributes to key decision-making that affects economic development in Georgia and around the world.

According to EAS Chair and Professor Judith Curry, the school's contributions include applications associated with air quality, water resources, public health, urban environment, forecasting support for economic and public policy decision-making, and natural hazards. For example, it has a Center for Environmental Predictions and Decisions, and undertakes several projects concerning air quality. One effort is looking at greenhouse warming and implications for energy production, and yet another studying the impact of urbanization on the water resources of the Appalachicola-Chatahoochee-Flint River System. EAS faculty provide state and metro **Atlanta** officials with information concerning ozone levels, predicting what days of the year area residents need to take special precautions due to ozone.

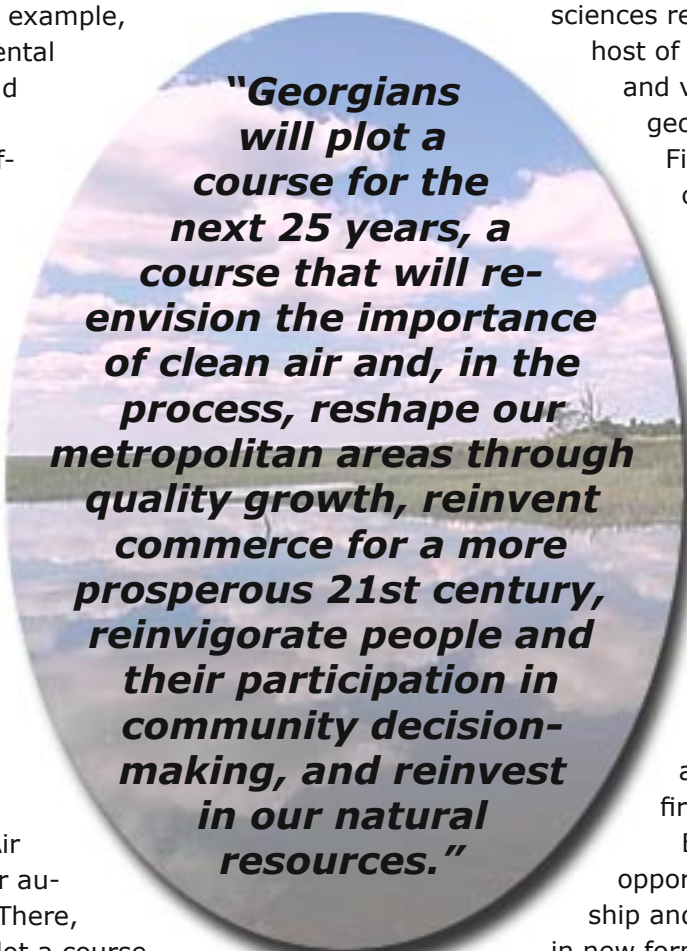
A major endeavor involving EAS will be the Georgia Air Quality Summit scheduled for autumn 2006 at Georgia Tech. There, says Curry, "Georgians will plot a course for the next 25 years, a course that will re-envision the importance of clean air and, in the process, reshape our metropolitan areas through quality growth, reinvent commerce for a more prosperous 21st century, reinvigorate people and their participation in community decision-making, and reinvest in our natural resources."

The school's research also entails new tools and techniques, such as development of innovative sensors and instrumentation to measure air and water quality. Long-range weather forecasting, in time

scales of two weeks to six months and combining numerical and statistical techniques, is currently being applied to disaster management and agriculture in Bangladesh, says Curry, who adds that EAS also is using small, unmanned vehicles to conduct environmental measurements. Such techniques could be applied to assist Georgia communities in dealing with similar issues.

EAS also actively contributes to the body of knowledge in the earth and atmospheric sciences realm. Students can study a host of topics, from climate change and variability to geophysics and geohazards to oceanography. Fifty percent of undergrads go on to graduate work, says Curry, and half of those study earth and atmospheric sciences. The other half pursue degrees in law, public policy, city planning, business, architecture, and international affairs, among others. For graduates receiving master's and doctoral degrees, 22 percent work in government, 31 percent in academia, and 40 percent in private-sector organizations, such as environmental engineering firms and oil companies.

EDI and EAS are exploring opportunities for future partnership and collaboration that will result in new forms of assistance to Georgia's communities. Curry notes that EAS already has some connections with EDI in the sphere of air quality, and is interested in exploring further opportunities in coastal zone management, heavy-metal contamination of water resources, and application of environmental information and weather and climate forecasts to power generation. ♦



**"Georgians will plot a course for the next 25 years, a course that will re-envision the importance of clean air and, in the process, reshape our metropolitan areas through quality growth, reinvent commerce for a more prosperous 21st century, reinvigorate people and their participation in community decision-making, and reinvest in our natural resources."**

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# Professional Development Planner

## March

 38th Annual Basic Economic Development Course, **Atlanta**, March 28-31, 2005


## May

 LOCI, **Atlanta**, May 3-4, 2005

## July

  
IEDC Business Retention and Expansion  
**Savannah**, July 20-21, 2005


## August

 Tax-Exempt Revenue Bond Financing, **Atlanta**, August 23, 2005


## October

 LOCI, **Atlanta**, October 4-5, 2005

## November

 IEDC Real Estate and Redevelopment, **Atlanta**, November 8-9, 2005

## January

 Emerging Trends in Location Analysis 2006, **Atlanta**, January 24-25, 2006

## E-courses

**eXtreme Marketing for Economic Developers**

**The Ripple Effect**

*For more information on these and other courses, contact Martha Schoonmaker, CEcD at 404/894-0332 or [martha.schoonmaker@edi.gatech.edu](mailto:martha.schoonmaker@edi.gatech.edu).*

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